

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Innovation Grants

AGENCY: Commodity Credit Corporation, Natural Resources Conservation Service,
Department of Agriculture (USDA).

ACTION: Notice of request for proposals.

SUMMARY: Section 1240H of the Food Security Act of 1985, as added by section 2301 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-171) established Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8]. Through CIG, the Secretary of Agriculture may pay the cost of competitive grants to carry out projects that stimulate innovative approaches to leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production. The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of EQIP and CIG to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is a vice president of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). EQIP is administered by NRCS under the authorities of the CCC. Authority for administering the state component of the CIG is delegated to the State Conservationist in 7 CFR Part 1466.27(h).

This notice announces the availability of up to \$150,000 of CCC funds for CIG in New Jersey in Fiscal Year 2005. The funds will be awarded to project proposals through a statewide competitive grants process. Applications are requested from eligible government or non-government organizations or individuals for competitive

consideration of grant awards for single or multi-year projects, not to exceed three years.

This notice sets forth the applicant and project eligibility requirements, application procedures, and grant award criteria for proposed projects.

DATES: Applications must be received in the NRCS New Jersey State Office by 3 p.m., Daylight Savings Time (EDT) on Friday, June 3, 2005.

ADDRESSES: Written applications should be sent to Janice Reid, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 220 Davidson Ave, 4th floor, Somerset NJ 08873.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Janice Reid, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 220 Davidson Ave, 4th floor, Somerset NJ 08873. Phone: (732) 537-6042; facsimile: (732) 537-6095; e-mail: janice.reid@nj.usda.gov; Subject: Conservation Innovation Grants RFP; or consult the NJ NRCS Web site at <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/index.htm>.

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE (CFDA) NUMBER: 10.912

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Background

Of the nearly 1.4 billion acres of private land in the United States, 931 million, or roughly 70%, are in agriculture. The activities on these lands have a direct effect on the soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources, as well as the social, cultural, and economic condition of U.S. communities, towns, and counties. Regional and local differences in farm structure, farm practices, and farm products make delivering innovative agricultural conservation technical assistance a challenge. National agricultural research and

development may not always have the capacity to develop, test, and transfer new or innovative conservation technologies and approaches rapidly or effectively to account for regional variances in the agricultural industry. Consequently, there is a need to expediently develop, test, implement, and transfer innovative farm and ranch conservation technologies and approaches for adoption in the largest applicable market available. Conservation Innovation Grants are awarded, in part, to stimulate this purpose.

B. Availability of Funding

Effective on the publication date of this notice, the CCC announces the availability of up to \$150,000 in New Jersey for CIG. The CCC, acting through NRCS, must receive applications for participation by 3 p.m., Daylight Savings Time (EDT) on Friday, June 3, 2005. Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive grants process for projects within New Jersey. CIG will emphasize projects that have a goal of providing benefits over a large geographic area. These projects may be farm-based, watershed-based, county, multi-county, or statewide in scope. Individual awards are not to exceed \$75,000.

State, tribal, and local governmental entities, non-governmental organizations, and individuals may apply. Selection will be based on the criteria established in this notice, and selected applicants may receive grants of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. Applicants must provide non-Federal funding for at least 50 percent of the project cost. Up to 50 percent (25 percent of the total project cost) of the applicant's match may be from in-kind contributions. The remainder must be cash.

The CIG final rule describes implementation of a national and State component of CIG. The purpose of this request for proposals is to fulfill the State component of CIG.

The intent of the State component is to provide flexibility to NRCS State Conservationists to target CIG funds to individual producers and smaller organizations that may possess promising innovations, but may not compete well on the larger scale of the national grants competition.

C. Overview of Conservation Innovation Grants

The CCC will accept applications for single- or multi- year projects, not to exceed three years, submitted to NRCS from eligible entities, including Federally-recognized Indian Tribes, State and local governments, and non-governmental organizations and individuals. The purpose of CIG is to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) into NRCS technical manuals or guides, or to the private sector.

Applications are solicited for the full range of natural resource conservation concerns detailed in this notice. Applications are accepted from any eligible entity for projects benefiting or located on lands operated by New Jersey EQIP eligible producers.

Proposal submissions to the New Jersey NRCS will be evaluated by a technical peer review panel and scored based on the Criteria for Proposal Evaluation identified in this RFP. Scored applications will be forwarded to the State Conservationist for final award selections.

Grant awards will be made from the NRCS New Jersey State Office after the grantee agrees to the terms and conditions of the NRCS grant agreement.

II. Natural Resource Conservation Concerns

Applications should demonstrate the use of innovative technologies or innovative approaches, or both, to address a natural resource concern or concerns. It is NRCS' intention to provide flexibility to obtain the greatest degree of creativity and innovation possible in addressing natural resource concerns, consistent with the overall program objective.

The five natural resource concerns for possible funding through Conservation Innovation Grants for fiscal year 2005 are:

A. Water Resources

The objective of this natural resource concern is to implement new technologies and/or approaches to maintain, restore, or enhance water quality and/or quantity in watersheds with predominantly agricultural land uses while sustaining productivity.

Subtopics include:

1. Nutrient, pesticide, and pathogen transport to surface water and groundwater;
2. Sediment transport to surface water;
3. Irrigation management for water conservation;
4. Aquifer recharge/maintenance of groundwater supplies; and,
5. Increased water supplies/availability through alternative treatment or reuse strategies.

B. Soil Resources

The objective of this conservation concern is to implement new technologies and/or approaches to maintain, restore, or enhance soil resources associated with agricultural and forest land uses while sustaining productivity. Subtopics include:

1. Erosion reduction;
2. Accumulation of harmful levels of constituents in soils, including nutrients, metals, salts; and,
3. Overall soil quality and productivity.

C. Atmospheric Resources

The objective of this conservation concern is to implement new technologies and/or approaches to maintain, restore, or enhance air quality and atmospheric resources through agricultural and forest practices while sustaining productivity. Subtopics include:

1. Agricultural emissions of particulates, odors, volatile organic compounds, and greenhouse gases;
2. Carbon sequestration in soil and through other mechanisms; and,
3. Bio-based energy opportunities.

D. Grazing Land and Forest Health

The objective of this conservation concern is to implement new technologies and/or approaches to maintain, restore, or enhance grazing land and forest health while sustaining productivity. Subtopics include:

1. Invasive species management on grazing and forest land;
2. Effects of pests, diseases, and fragmentation on forest and grazing land quality/health; and,
3. Systems or practices to minimize overgrazing and restore lands suffering effects of overgrazing.

E. Wildlife Habitat

The objective of this conservation concern is to implement new technologies and/or approaches for environmentally sound wildlife habitat management while sustaining agricultural productivity. Subtopics include:

1. Riparian area management and restoration;
2. Invasive species management;
3. Biodiversity; and,
4. Wetland function and health.

III. Eligibility

A. Organization or Individual Eligibility

CIG applicants must be a Federally-recognized Indian Tribe; State or local unit of government; non-governmental organization; or individual.

1. Payment Limitation - Section 1240G of the Food Security Act of 1985 (as amended by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002), 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-7, imposes a \$450,000 limitation for all cost-share or incentive payments disbursed to individuals or entities under an EQIP contract between 2002 and 2007. The limitation applies to CIG in the following manner:

a. CIG funds are awarded through grant agreements; these grant agreements are not EQIP contracts. Thus, CIG awards are not limited by the payment limitation.

b. Direct or indirect payments made to an individual or entity using funds from a CIG award to carry out structural, vegetative, or management practices count toward each individual's or entity's EQIP payment limitation. Through project progress reports, CIG grantees are responsible for certifying that producers involved in CIG projects do not

exceed the payment limitation. Further, all direct and indirect payments made to producers using CIG funds must be reported to NRCS.

B. Project Eligibility

To be eligible, projects must involve landowners who meet the EQIP eligibility requirements of 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-1. Further, all agricultural producers receiving direct or indirect payments through participation in a CIG project must meet the EQIP eligibility requirements. Participating producers are not required to have an EQIP contract. Applications must describe the extent of participation of EQIP eligible producers. Refer to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/> for more information on EQIP and eligibility requirements.

Technologies and approaches that are eligible for funding in a project's geographic area through EQIP are ineligible for CIG funding except where the use of those technologies and approaches demonstrates clear innovation. The burden falls on the applicant to sufficiently describe the innovative features of the proposed technology or approach. Applicants should reference the NJ EQIP Program Guidance (list of eligible practices) by contacting the NRCS State office, or by visiting the NJ EQIP web site: <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/index.html>).

CIG will fund single- and multi- year projects, not to exceed three years. Individual projects funded through New Jersey CIG in fiscal year 2005 may not receive more than \$75,000 from NRCS.

The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. NRCS will designate a Federal Grant Representative to provide technical oversight for each project receiving an award.

IV. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

For the purposes of CIG, the proposed innovative project or activity must encompass the development and field testing, evaluation, and implementation of:

- Conservation adoption incentive systems, including market-based systems; or,
- Promising conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, and approaches.

To be given priority consideration, the innovative project or activity:

- Will have been studied sufficiently to indicate a good probability for success;
- Demonstrates, tests, evaluates, or verifies environmental (soil, water, air, plants, and animal) effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability in the field;
- Adapts conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, approaches, and incentive systems to improve performance, and encourage adoption;
- Introduces conservation systems, approaches, and procedures from another geographic area or agricultural sector; and,
- Adapts conservation technology, management, or incentive systems to improve performance.

V. Application and Submission Information

A. Application Materials

Applications must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration for a grant. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

Applications must be submitted in the following format:

1. Cover Sheet: Applications must use Standard Form 424 as the cover sheet for each project proposal. Standard Form 424 can be downloaded from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/sf424.pdf>, or obtained from the New Jersey NRCS State Office. Note that in Section 15 of the SF-424, the funding amounts listed must reflect the amounts requested and contributed for the entire duration of the project.

2. Project Abstract: Each proposal must contain a summary of not more than one page that provides the following:

- a. Project title;
- b. Project duration (beginning and ending dates);
- c. Name, address, telephone, e-mail, and other contact information for the project director (please provide a mailing address, not a P.O. box);
- d. Names and affiliations of project collaborators;
- e. Estimated number of EQIP eligible producers involved in the project;
- f. Project objectives and natural resource concern(s) to be addressed;
- g. Summary of the work to be performed;
- h. Total project cost; and,
- i. Total Federal funds requested.

3. Project Description: Each project must be completely and accurately described in no more than 10 typewritten, double-spaced pages, which must include the following:

- a. Project background: Describe the history of, and need for, the proposed innovation. Provide evidence that the proposed innovation has been studied sufficiently to indicate a good probability for success of the project;

b. Project objectives: Be specific, using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project's purpose and goals. Describe how, based on the description of innovative conservation projects and activities provided in section IV, the project is innovative;

c. Project methods: Describe clearly the methodology of the project and the tools or processes that will be used to implement the project;

d. Location and size of project or project area: Describe the location of the project and the relative size and scope (e.g., acres, farm types and demographics, etc.) of the project area. Provide a map, if possible;

e. Producer participation: Estimate the number of producers involved in the project, and describe the extent of their involvement;

f. Project action plan and timeline: Provide a table listing project actions, timeframes, and associated milestones through project completion.

g. Project management: Give a detailed description of how the project will be organized and managed. Include a list of key project personnel, their relevant education or experience, and their anticipated contributions to the project. Explain the level of participation required in the project by government and non-government entities.

Identify who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project;

h. Benefits or results expected and transferability: Identify the results and benefits to be derived from the proposed project activities. Identify project beneficiaries—for example, agricultural producers by type or region or sector; rural communities; municipalities. Explain how these entities will benefit. In addition, describe how results will be communicated to others via outreach activities; and,

i. Project evaluation: Describe the methodology or procedures to be followed to evaluate the project, determine technical feasibility, and quantify the results of the project for the final report. Grant recipients will be required to provide a biannual report of progress, quarterly financial reports, and a final project report to NRCS. Instructions for submitting reports will be detailed in the grant agreement.

j. Environmental impacts: Describe the anticipated environmental effects of the proposed project. This description will be used to determine whether an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is needed for any given project, prior to the awarding of grant funds. The applicant is responsible for the cost of an EA or EIS, should one be required. This cost may be counted as part of the grantee's in-kind contribution.

4. Budget Information: Use Standard Form 424A to document budget needs. Standard Form 424A can be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/sf424a.pdf>, or obtained from the New Jersey NRCS State Office. In addition, provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project. Itemize the costs necessary for successful completion of the proposed project. Indicate the total amount (both cash and in-kind) of non-Federal matching support that will be provided to the proposed project. Identify the source, the amount, and the nature (cash or in-kind) of the matching funds. In-kind costs of equipment or project personnel cannot exceed 50 percent of the applicant's match. The remainder of the match must be provided in cash.

CIG funds may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law, or approved in writing by the Authorized Departmental Officer in advance of incurring such costs:

- a. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
- b. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the grant;
- c. Costs incurred after the expiration date of the grant (including any approved no-cost extensions of time). However, grant funds may be expended after the expiration date to liquidate legitimate obligations incurred by the grantee on or before the expiration date;
- d. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and any amendments thereto;
- e. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
- f. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities;
- g. Consulting services performed by a Federal employee during official duty hours when such consulting services result in the payment of additional compensation to the employee; and,
- h. Renovation or refurbishment of research or related spaces; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces; and the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

This list is not exhaustive. Questions regarding the allowances of particular items of cost should be directed to the contact person above.

5. Declaration of EQIP Eligibility: Applicants must make a declaration in writing that they, or parties involved in the project, are eligible for EQIP. Refer to

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/> for more information on EQIP eligibility requirements.

6. Certifications: All applications must include a signed Standard Form (SF) 424B - Assurances, Non-construction Programs. SF 424B may be found at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/sf424b.pdf>, or contact the New Jersey NRCS State office;

Applicants, by signing and submitting an application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following from 7 Code of Federal Register (CFR):

- a. Part 3017, Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement) (http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_04/7cfr3017_04.html);
- b. Part 3018, New Restrictions on Lobbying (http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_04/7cfr3018_04.html); and,
- c. Part 3021, Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance) (http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_04/7cfr3021_04.html).

B. Submission of Proposal

Applications for project grants must include all required forms and narrative sections described in section V.A. above; incomplete applications will not be considered. If submitting proposals for more than one project, submit a separate, complete application package for each project. Applications are to be typewritten on 8½" x 11" white paper, double spaced, and on one side only. The text of the proposal must be typewritten in a font no smaller than 12-point, with one-inch margins. Applicants must submit one signed original and six (6) complete copies of each project application. Each copy of the proposal must be stapled securely in the upper left hand corner. Hard copies must be

accompanied by an electronic copy on a 3½-inch diskette or compact disc (CD).

Electronic files must be either Microsoft Word or Acrobat (pdf) files. Applications submitted via facsimile or e-mail will not be accepted. Information not requested will be discarded. Applications must be received at the address noted above by 3 p.m. EDT on Friday, June 3, 2005. A proposal's postmark date is not a factor in whether an application is received on time. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in proposal delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS. Receipt of all applications will be acknowledged by e-mail. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses. If the applicant's e-mail address is not indicated, NRCS will acknowledge receipt of the application by letter. If the applicant does not receive an acknowledgment within 60 days of the submission deadline, please contact the program manager.

VI. Application Review Information

A. Proposal Review and Selection Process

Prior to technical review, each application will be screened for completeness. Incomplete applications, including those that do not meet eligibility requirements, will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be e-mailed or mailed to the applicant.

Applications meeting the requirements of this notice will be scored by the State Technical Committee members and NRCS Technical Specialists (peer review panel) against the Criteria for Proposal Evaluation identified below. Scored applications will be forwarded to the Program Manager, which will certify the rankings from the peer review

panels, and ensure that the proposal evaluations are consistent with program objectives. The Program Manager will make recommendations to the State Conservationist for final selection and funding decisions. Applicants who have been selected will be notified by mail within 15 business days of the final selection. Applicants whose proposals have not been selected will be notified within 15 business days of the final selection.

B. Criteria for Proposal Evaluation

Peer review panels will use the following criteria to evaluate project proposals.

Each of the four criteria carries an equal weight of 25 percent.

1. Purpose and goals :

- a. The purpose and goals of the project are clearly stated;
- b. The project adheres to the natural resource conservation concerns for FY 2004

stated in this notice; and,

- c. There is clear and significant potential for a positive and measurable outcome.

2. Soundness of approach or design:

- a. The project adheres to the description of innovative projects or activities found

in section IV of this notice;

- b. Technical design and implementation strategy is based on sound science;

- c. There is a good likelihood of project success;

- d. The project substantively involves EQIP eligible producers; and,

- e. The project promotes environmental enhancement and protection in

conjunction with agricultural production.

3. Project management :

a. The proposal has clear milestones and timelines, designated staff, and demonstrates collaboration;

b. The project staff has the technical expertise needed to do the work; and

c. The budget is reasonable and adequately justified.

4. Transferability:

a. There is great potential to transfer the approach or technology to others and/or to other geographical areas; and,

b. The project will result in the development of technical or related materials (e.g., technical standards, technical notes, manuals, handbooks, software) that will help foster adoption of the innovative technology or approach by other producers, and in other geographic areas.

VII. Grant Agreement

The CCC, through NRCS, will use a grant agreement with selected applicants to document participation in the CIG component of EQIP. The grant agreement will include:

- project objectives and deliverables;
- project progress and budget reporting requirements;
- award amount and budget information;
- information regarding requests for advance of funds or reimbursement;
- other requirements and terms deemed necessary by the CCC to protect the interests of the United States.

Neither the approval of any application nor the award of any grant agreement commits or obligates the United States to provide further support of a project or any portion thereof or implies any endorsement.

VIII. Patents and Inventions

Allocation of rights to patents and inventions shall be in accordance with USDA regulation 7 CFR 3019.36. This regulation provides that small businesses normally may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. In accordance with 7 CFR 3019.2, this provision will also apply to commercial organizations for the purposes of CIG. USDA receives a royalty-free license for Federal Government use, reserves the right to require the patentee to license others in certain circumstances, and requires that anyone exclusively licensed to sell the invention in the United States must normally manufacture it domestically.

Signed in Somerset, NJ, on March 17, 2005.

/s/

ANTHONY KRAMER

State Conservationist

Natural Resources Conservation Service